

Statement from the Comparative Literature, English, and Creative Writing Graduate Students

On behalf of the graduate students of the Comparative Literature, English, and Creative Writing departments at the University of California, Irvine, we would like to follow in the footsteps of our colleagues in the departments of Anthropology, Culture and Theory, Criminology, Law & Society, and the School of Education in the demand for accountability regarding the racist police violence which occurred at the peaceful march on Thursday, February 20th in solidarity with the Cost of Living Adjustment (COLA) strikers at UC Santa Cruz (UCSC). Moreover, we write in full support of the UC-wide COLA wildcat strikes led by our courageous colleagues at UCSC and demand that the 80+ terminated graduate students at UCSC be reinstated immediately.

On Thursday, February 20th, nearly 200 students and their supporters marched to Aldrich Hall in solidarity with strikers at UCSC, whose wildcat strike began on December 9th, 2019. As of this letter's release, the strike has spread to UC Santa Barbara and UC Davis. Graduate students at *every* UC campus are now taking up the call for a COLA for every graduate student regardless of residence, immigration status, visa documentation, employment or funding status, to bring graduate students out of rent burden without raising tuition or campus fees, and with a guarantee of non-retaliation for everyone, including lecturers. During the events of February 20th, the administration, in a refusal to meet with the students, placed the building on restrictive access, employing the services of a heavy and armed police presence to verbally and physically intimidate and obstruct student access to the university building. Officer Trish Harding of the UCIPD proceeded to violently assault and arrest a Black alumna, who was not affiliated with the march, thus escalating the events in a flagrant demonstration of the systemic anti-Black racism endemic to UCI, the UC system, California, and the United States. We condemn the UCIPD for their hypocrisy and brutality in assaulting and arresting a Black woman, and then charging her with assault, and we condemn the silence of the UC administration and the wider campus regarding this arrest. We regret that our response has not been expressed sooner, and we are committed to fighting the pervasive anti-Blackness that leads to the violence that Black students face everyday at UCI.

Meanwhile, the rapid emergence of the COLA movement across all UC campuses should surprise no one. It is the culmination of over a decade of austerity imposed by the University of California in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis. During this same period, stagnant wages and rising costs of living have caused widespread economic distress. The refusal of the UC to work to alleviate the effects of these trends on its most vulnerable workers has at last led to a breaking point. With ever increasing tuition and \$175 million in hidden funds at the UC, graduate students are skeptical of the claim that nothing can be done to raise their standard of living. Facing steep raises in rents during the three year period of our current UAW contract, graduate students throughout the UC are asking for nothing beyond what would afford us our dignity by demanding a cost of living adjustment. In demanding a UC-wide COLA for all, we take inspiration from workers' struggles within and outside of the university and across the globe.

The undersigned graduate students at the UCI Department of Comparative Literature, English, and Creative Writing stand in full solidarity with striking workers at UCSC, UCD, UCSB, and

all other UC campuses, both in their struggles to confront anti-Blackness in their respective school communities and their demands for a living wage for all graduate student workers. We further support the joint statement released by the UCI Black Student Union (BSU) and United Students Against Sweatshops (USAS) and their demands: We unequivocally echo their calls for action, and urge other graduate students, undergraduate students, and faculty members at UCI to join us in maintaining the fight against the University of California system's settler-colonialism, anti-Blackness, and ruthless economic exploitation of laboring bodies.

Signed in solidarity,

Wujun Ke
Thomas Williams
Anastasia Baginski
Patrick McBurnie
James Goebel
Shyam Patel
Robert Barrett
Anders Johnson
Danilo Caputo
Anannya Mukherjee
Amanda Hickok
Michael Berlin
Pragya Trivedi
Michael Mahoney
Brandon Wild
Amanda Mixon
Williston Chase
Anandi Rao
Miles Parnegg
Alexandra Yan
Rose DuCharme
Andrew Hill
Allison Dziuba
Sarah Hoenicke
Yassaman Rahimi
Madeleine Read
Jean Little
Shiqi Lin
Claire Burdick
Austin Carter
Dalton Salvo

Katherine Damm
Megan Cole
Jon-David Settell
Danah Alfaiakawi
Joseph Labagnao Ligunas
Pedro Daher
Andrew Shipley
Mackenzie Weeks Mahoney
Ashwin Bajaj
Gayatri Mehra
John Gillespie

And graduate students who wish to remain anonymous.